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ABSTRACT

This speech summarizes the evaluations of the 1962 summer Language Institutes sponsored by the National Defense Education Act (N.D.E.A.) of 1958. Criticisms of the programs include discussion of: (1) institute program flexibility, (2) linguistics, (3) the lecture method of teaching, (4) demonstration classes, (5) methods courses, and (6) second-level institutes abroad. A list of 17 areas critical to the success of the program is furnished. (RL)

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EVALUATIONS OF THE SUMMER 1962 LANGUAGE INSTITUTES

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Explanatory note: This is the text of the speech given by Charles L. King of the Language Institute Section of the Office of Education at the meeting of the Institute Directors in Washington, D. C. in March, 1963. His speech summarized the evaluations of the 1962 Language Institutes. I hope you will find it interesting and informative.

I have recently reviewed the reports by our evaluators on the 1962 Summer program. My job now is to share the essential elements of these reports with you. It would seem to be a simple task, but in reading the 80 reports written by all kinds of evaluators on all kinds of institutes directed by the widest variety of directors, each a rugged individualist, the overall impression I got was one of confusion. In spite of my confusion, however, I have been able to abstract from the reports a few items which may be of general interest to you. Obviously, a major purpose of the evaluations was to discover weak spots in the program, and if I accent the negative, rather than the positive, the reason is that I am sure that it will be more profitable for us to focus on deficiencies rather than on what a wonderful success we have all been. I might say, in passing, however, that we all agree that the program in 1962 was very successful. Back in 1960 the Freeman evaluation team reported that great improvement had been made in 1960 over the 1959 pilot program. Comparing the reports of 1962 with those of 1960 it is clear that much progress has continued to be made. Before proceeding further this afternoon I should like to emphasize that the small band of fanatics in Washington, known as the Language Institute Section, have not yet found the final, repeat, final solutions to many of the institute problems. We welcome new ideas, as we always have, whether those ideas conform to the Freeman Report or to our own preconceived notions, or not. We do, however, have to hew the line as far as our purpose is concerned. Our mandate states that the institutes shall provide training "in the use of new teaching methods and instructional materials." Since the use of modern teaching methods and techniques depends upon a certain audiolingual proficiency on the part of the teacher, the main task of most institutes becomes a rather narrow one, namely, to increase the audiolingual competence of the participants and to teach the effective use of new teaching methods and techniques. I should first like to discuss the first-level institutes of last summer, as seen by the evaluators. Obviously, not everything I say will apply to each and every institute. I can only say, "if the shoe fits, put it on."

(1) We still found directors in 1962 who apparently were expecting a homogeneous group of participants, or at least seemed to be since they did not provide a program flexible enough to meet the needs of either the less-prepared or the better-prepared of their participants. It is easier to talk about this problem than to solve it, but some of our evaluators were convinced that in several cases where this problem was especially acute the institute director seemed either blind to the situation or simply chose to ignore it. Greater flexibility of program was needed. One of the biggest single mistakes a director can make is to fail to adjust his program to the abilities of the participants. A big offender in this respect were the Civilization courses. In some cases dividing the course into two sections took care of the problem, with the course being balanced on the side of content for the upper-level group, and with content being sacrificed in favor of comprehension for the lower-level group. In almost every instance what was needed to make adequate provision for the varying abilities of

FL 000 295

participants was not more staff, but a more imaginative use of existing staff, especially of the native informants, and flexibility in adjusting the schedule.

(2) I should now like to move on to the Linguistics in the Institutes, not just Linguistics, but Linguistics in the Institutes. I understand there is a difference. We have been using the term, Applied Linguistics, with the hope of encouraging a happy marriage of practice and theory. Either practice or theory without the other is inadequate for an institute, yet there were courses in linguistics which were all theory, the Why, and others that were all practice, the How. The marriage of the Why and the How is further complicated by the severe time limitation, and therefore, the necessity to treat only those aspects of linguistics which are judged to be of most immediate value to the participants. In some cases Syntax was treated to the exclusion of Phonology, and in other institutes the reverse happened. Neither case is ideal, but would probably be preferable to an attempt to cover the whole field of linguistics, an obvious impossibility, but one that has been tried, most unsuccessfully, in the institute program. I must say here that participant-reaction to the courses labelled Linguistics was, in spite of continued shortcomings, much more favorable in 1962 than in 1960. One observer who participated in both the 1960 and 1962 evaluations, exclaimed: "What a change from 1960!" Just what should go into an Applied Linguistics course in an institute, I do not know. Dr. Moulton will have some ideas on this problem tomorrow morning, so I will now leave the subject, and pass on to the Civilization or Culture courses.

(3) In 1960 the Freeman team reported that there were "still too many lectures in the 'old Key.'" In 1962 our evaluators found that this part of the curriculum was, in general, where the least imagination was shown. I should like to quote: "If I am not mistaken," writes one evaluator, "institutes are supposed to teach the contemporary culture of the foreign country concerned. I beleive too that 'culture' is to be understood in the anthropological sense. My visits have convinced me that what is usually taught is neither contemporary nor anthropological." This same evaluator goes on to say, "Frequently an institute's teacher of the culture course is unable or unwilling to cope with the situation. Also, he fears that the participants' MLA test scores (and hence his own teaching reputation) will suffer if he does not teach for the test. The result is the general practice of teaching the old-fashioned historical course, political and literary, which begins with the Middle Ages and may or may not reach the 20th Century." Another evaluator wrote: "Too much time was spent on details such as intrigues leading to the succession to the throne, battles, etc., and not enough stress was put on broad trends, economics, art, culture, and geography." On the other hand, some directors and culture instructors have shown initiative and ingenuity in the culture-phase of the institutes, so that, although we still have a long way to go, some progress is being made. Even though the content may not be anthropological nor contemporary, in some cases at least the content has been made comprehensible by such devices as sectioning, providing an outline of the lecture ahead of time to the participants along with a list of difficult lexical items, taping the lecture or a summary of it for relistening afterwards in the laboratory, discussion of the content in controlled conversation classes and at language tables, etc. Tomorrow morning, Dr. Starr will tell us what he means by culture with a small "c", so I shall leave this subject, and hurry on to the Demonstration Classes.

(4) Some directors regard the Demonstration Class as the most important component of the institute. Have a sloppy demonstration class, and you may fail in your primary purpose. In one institute the demonstration teacher

was using audiolingual materials but she was not using the audiolingual approach. In another institute the demonstration consisted of a "hodge-podge of misused new and old techniques." One evaluator commented: "The enthusiasm of the participants for the audio-lingual method is in direct proportion to the skill and ability of the demonstration teacher. This is perhaps the most important appointment on the institute staff...Skepticism or indifference toward the audio-lingual method was encountered in those institutes where the demonstration teaching was of indifferent quality." I should like to pass on to you two devices observed by evaluators this past summer. The first is a requirement that participants turn in a sheet of comments or questions after each observation of the demonstration class. The second is the practice of a two-language institute of "having the French group, for example, occasionally visit the Spanish demonstration class and and vice versa." One evaluator writes: "Many points of the new method become clearer when one sees them used with a new language. This back and forth visiting will probably be continued and even increased." Likewise, I think that some cross-visitation of demonstration classes in a single-language, two-level institute, i. e., between FLES and secondary sections, can be useful.

Before leaving the Demonstration Class I should like to quote another visitor to institutes who found that "following even excellent teaching demonstrations, very little, if any, reference to linguistics and methodological principles has been made in discussion sessions that followed. It has seemed to me that these have been golden opportunities lost to emphasize practical applications of such principles to the actual teaching-learning situation. Undoubtedly the enrollees may perceive certain elements of this translation of principles into practice, but the thought has occurred to me that perhaps some deliberate structuring at this point, didactic if you wish, would be useful--even of the seemingly obvious." This sounds very much like the Freeman Report, which stated that "discussion of the demonstration class was the most successful function of the methods class. The participants cannot be trusted to draw all the necessary conclusions or to observe all the important aspects of the technique and procedures. These have to be pointed out both in advance and afterward." (underlining Mr. King's)

(5) Hand and hand, of course, with the Demonstration Class goes the Professional Preparation or Methods Course. In this area, one evaluator comments: "Probably the most widespread weakness was the concentration on one set of materials to the exclusion of others. This practice...seemed to imply an official endorsement. Generally lacking was any systematic survey of available materials." I might also say that laboratory theory and practice were frequently skimped, with instruction being relegated to technicians, or omitted. Some of my colleagues will be speaking to you on this general subject later this afternoon, so I shall move on to the subject of language upgrading, especially in the audiolingual skills.

(6) Obviously, this cuts across almost the entire program, although I am particularly referring to those courses whose sole purpose is language upgrading such as Controlled Conversation, Pattern Practice both in the laboratory and in special classes outside the laboratory, Remedial Phonetics, Reading and Writing courses, as well as to the use of the foreign language in other classes and outside the class. It is significant that several evaluators independently emphasized the strong need for courses in Applied Phonetics in order to give the participants a firm foundation upon which to build their audiolingual skills. The difference between a curriculum with a course in phonetics, and one without is the difference between a directed plan for the acquisition of an acceptable pronunciation and sheer hit-or-miss.

One evaluator wrote: "In all the institutes, except University X, there were participants whose knowledge of the language was so minimal that they could not understand the courses taught in the target language or benefit from advanced language courses. A great deal of high-powered effort was obviously being wasted on participants." These comments point up both the need for more adequate sectioning as well as attention to audiolingual upgrading. Another evaluator puts it in this positive fashion: "My suggestion is simply that the institutes put first things first. Most participants need primarily to practice speaking and hearing. We know this and they know it too. If audiolingual teaching is to succeed, the institutes must impart good audiolingual skill and techniques. If audiolingual teaching does not succeed, its failure may be charged in part to our insistence on what is essentially peripheral to the primary purpose of the institutes: 'To increase the audiolingual competence of teachers of modern foreign languages and to introduce them to new teaching methods and techniques.'"

(7) The best institutes in 1962, as well as in 1960, provided adequate opportunity for language practice not only inside but also outside the formal classroom. One evaluator wrote: "Perhaps the best feature of this institute is that the participants receive constant practice in speaking and hearing French. During the mornings French and English are mixed, but from then on only French is used. The participants speak French at lunch, they follow this with fifty minutes of scheduled French conversation, they hear and speak French in a laboratory hour, they speak it in a coffee break, they hear and speak it in the civilization class, they speak French at dinner, after dinner they often see a French film--and, at least on one of my evenings at the institute, they spoke French far into the night! The esprit de corps at this institute, incidentally, is magnificent." Suffice it to say here that some institutes were doing splendidly in this area, and others left much to be desired.

(8) For just a moment, now, I would like to comment on the second-level institutes abroad. A recurring criticism of these operations--found in both the Final Reports of the directors as well as made by the evaluators--revolved around the heterogeneous backgrounds of the participants, and consequent problems in adjusting the program to the ability-levels of the participants. A weakness common to most second-level directors, it seemed--even after three years of institutes--was to expect better prepared enrollees than they got. The fact that all second-level selectees have all had the common experience of a first-level institute does little to assure homogeneity, especially when 80 participants may well represent half as many first-level institutes, and we all know that no two institutes are exactly alike. Adjusting the program in second-level institutes to the level or levels of the participants is doubtlessly an extremely difficult task, but it must be done. And, in spite of the fact that we are beginning to classify second-level operations according to audiolingual proficiency-levels, the problem will ever be with us as long as we have institutes. The purpose of second-level institutes is the same as that of first-level institutes: to upgrade teachers of modern foreign languages. When this task has been satisfactorily accomplished the Language Institute Program will have worked itself out of a job.

I should now like to state, without comment, several recurring criticisms made by our evaluators of last summer's institutes, both first-level and second-level. Some of these weaknesses cut across areas which I have already discussed. Others do not. You might say that they are things which make a bad institute bad.

1. Inadequate in-service training and supervision of native informants.

2. A poorly organized schedule. (For example, one institute had only 45 minutes for lunch, followed by classes from 12:45 until 3:00. Why not a break after lunch, and a full hour for lunch?)

3. Very little cross-visitation of classes by staff members.

4. Inadequate personal supervision and coordination of the program by the director.

5. Institute classes scattered around the campus in half a dozen different widely-separated locations.

6. Too much reliance on local staff members simply because they are on the spot and want a job, rather than seeking the best talent available.

7. Individual tendency of staff members to "give a course" rather than to provide an integrated experience for the participants.

8. Inadequate adjustments in the schedule and program to meet the varying abilities of the participants.

9. Surreptitious assigning of homework by staff members, leading to overwork by some participants.

10. Failure to provide language tables in at least a semi-private area, and to control the seating of participants and native informants at the language tables.

11. Failure of co-curricular activities to complement or reinforce the curricular work and vice versa.

12. Inadequate monitoring of work done in the laboratory by the participants.

13. The use of sub-standard language laboratories.

14. Emphasis on the passive, rather than on the active, in both the curricular and co-curricular phases of the program.

15. Failure of the linguist to relate his course to the actual teaching situation faced by the participants.

16. Development of fluency in the language at the expense of accuracy.

17. In institutes having both FLES and secondary sections, a failure to adjust the program to meet the special needs of FLES teachers.

This list does not pretend to be complete; it is only a beginning. I would like to conclude, however, on a positive note by quoting from an evaluator who was pleased with what he had observed: "This institute," he writes, "rates an 'A' because the program is unified and carefully organized, the capable faculty is working overtime as a team, and the participants are getting a wealth of valuable language practice. Careful attention is being given to the different levels of participant ability. For example, Professor X, who gives the Civilization course, is devoting an hour each evening to language drill with a group of the weakest participants." What makes a good institute good? Some of the major ingredients were mentioned here: a unified and carefully organized program, a capable staff which works together "as a team," plenty of language practice, careful provisions for meeting "different levels of participant ability."